

For the past week, your nights have been troubled by a persistent nightmare:

Your ancestor grabs you by the wrist and drags you a great distance, through fog and mist, flying or falling you cannot tell. You stop above the trees in a huge forest stretching as far as you can see to the mountains beyond. Below you is a road. A column of Thule orc march along it. You are somehow aware that this is the past. Your ancestor grabs your face, rests their forehead against yours.

“Look. See. Know.” You hear their voice in your mind. Then they grab you and throw you down, into one of the orcs on the road. Your mind merges and joins to theirs.

In your hands is a map crudely scratched on bark. Surrounded by Orcs, you march in a column along a Varushkan road, blood stains your sword, your armor; Blood of the humans you have slaughtered to get here, Vales of people fighting to protect their resources, thinking they can keep that which is truly yours from you. Nothing will stop the Thule. Your Dragon is determined this land and it's treasures will be plundered. Their power will be added to the Thule Empire.

“Their weak and pathetic Emperor is fallen! This land is ours!” It shouts loud enough for theranks to hear, “It will bend to our will! It will give up its secrets, its power and its treasures! Prepare to leave the road!” The orcs under your command ready their weapons and form up around you, your mate takes up their drum and comes to march by your side. The drummers begin, slow, quiet rhythm. The Dragon strides to you and speaks more quietly so that only you may hear.

“You have the map. You know what it is we seek, the old one we tortured in the village, said it would be here. That crown will give us dominion over the monsters of this land. They will fight for us, not against us. Your name will be remembered. Your deeds here never forgotten!” then turning again to your troops it cries “MOVE OUT!”

The drums in the column behind you sound loud and clear and you swell with pride that you will lead. This mission is yours to command and this deed and the honour it bestows will be yours and your descendant's to wear forever. You stride confidently into the trees looking at the map.

Shouting your battle oath to sound off, the column behind call back their reply, The strength of their voices behind you gives you courage as you step across the wardings and into the trees. Your mate sounds their drum and behind you, the drums sound back. You march into the trees, alert for threats, but looking to the map and checking your direction by the sun as it filters through the trees... as you march the drums sound, call and reply and you shout your oath and the voices of the troops responds, the trees and the sounds of the animals around you begin to distort the sounds, the drums echo from the trees and make it sound as though they are scattered around you, but behind you, you can see the line of orc still disappearing into the shade of the trees in one strong line... There should be a clearing up ahead. You shout your oath and once more voices shout back, your drummer beats their drum and the

drums in the line behind reply. Was that fewer voices? Are there fewer drums? The trees are playing tricks on your ears. You find the clearing, now you must look for a twisted tree marked with blood. There it is! You see it and shout your battle oath, But there are only a few strangled scared replies. Your mate by your side sounds their drum...But the drums behind you grow quiet. Was that just three drums? Two? Just one drum sounding now?

You turn to shout to the drummers, to the troops and walk to the edge of the clearing to look among the trees, but they are gone, you turn to your drummer, your mate who was stood directly behind you, moments ago. They too are gone, silently ripped away into the trees, you didn't hear it, you didn't see...

As you peer into the shadows under the trees down the path your troops have cut, blood begins to fall like rain from the trees. It flows down the trunks and seeps into the forest floor, the path you forged now a river of the blood of your soldiers, limbs, scraps of armor and scarves flutter from the branches all around...

...and striding through them towards you is a nightmare.

A great humanoid figure made of twisted tree and torn flesh the Forest's Sovereign approaches you, reaches for you and raises you up in it's great gnarled limb it's eyes boring into yours. Vines stretch from its head and drill into your eyes, into your ears, you try to scream, but you no longer have control of your voice, of your body and you hear your own voice cry out echoing through the trees, down the path through which you came:

"It is here my Dragon! I have it. You can come to us! It is safe, come! Take that which is yours!"

The monster throws your body to the ground and bark and vines flow up to cover you. You stand now beside your new master and when the Dragon and your former family arrive, they will join you in glorious eternal service to the Forest. No orc will ever set foot off the roads in this land. No orc will ever get their hands on that which you protect. You and your new kin will serve and protect it forever.

You awaken with an itching and burning feeling in your fingertips as though a million tiny splinters were burrowing and scratching under your skin, but then they are still.

"Look. See. Know."